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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Washington, D. C.

FIELD MEMORANDUM SCS #1144

Re: General Operating Procedures For
Use by SCS in Carrying Out Its
Responsibility in the Agricultural
Conservation Program

February 20, 1952

TO ALL RANKING WASHINGTON AND FIELD OFFICERS:

The Secretary's Memorandum No. 1278 and related memorandums subsequently issued jointly and separately by the SCS and the PMA as well as the ACP 1952 National Bulletin and State Handbooks, outline the responsibility of SCS in connection with the technical phases of the Agricultural Conservation Program. A more detailed guide for carrying on this technical work is desirable in the interest of a consistent and uniform approach throughout the entire Service.

1. Considering the Work Load and Scheduling Assistance

A practical and equitable determination of priority of assistance in connection with applications of individuals, and groups of, landowners and operators is necessary in making full use of the technical assistance and other facilities available in applying and maintaining the maximum quantity of effective conservation on the land. It is intended that the governing bodies of soil conservation districts and county PMA committees, consider jointly, with the advice and consultation of the SCS technician and others, the work load of the district and ACP. Each agency should determine priorities for the work involved in their program in accordance with criteria, based on conservation needs and readiness to apply conservation practices applicable to the district or county. Such cooperative consideration of the work load expected by districts and under the ACP program is essential to assure assistance to all farmers and ranchers who are ready for and want help. Based on such cooperative analyses the technical help available should be scheduled so as to provide efficient use of technicians' time, as a full day's work for a technician or crew each time they visit a community. When the technical assistance to ACP participants or to district cooperators is scheduled independently it is often impossible to arrange a full day's work in a community with consequent increases in travel time and cost. For farms and ranches whose owners and operators are not, or do not now desire to become district cooperators, or those located outside conservation districts, the work load analyses and scheduling of assistance are the concern primarily of the PMA committees and SCS technicians.

Obviously, full cooperation and teamwork in establishing such priorities will lead most rapidly to attainment of the Department's basic soil conservation objective. And, PMA should be encouraged to systematically screen

applicants so as to (1) assure that farmers referred to SCS are ready, willing, and in a position to carry out the practice for which they have requested help and (2) refer to soil conservation districts farmers who want technical assistance.

2. Determination of need and practicability

a. Before SCS accepts a request to make a determination as to need and practicability of a practice the PMA county committee should make the administrative determination as to availability of funds and whether the practice otherwise qualifies for ACP assistance. Information about whether the practice is new on a farm or is a reorganization of an existing practice; whether the applicant has received payment for the same practice during a previous year, and the like, is pertinent to administrative approval by the county committees prior to submitting a request to SCS for determination of need and practicability. These determinations may sometimes be based on farmer interviews without benefit of close field examination. The technician and the PMA committee should review these procedures before the work season starts. If it is found by the technician that the proposed practice is clearly not within the purpose or conditions established for eligibility for assistance these facts should be reported to the PMA county committee. The farmer may be advised immediately if there is no doubt about eligibility. A visit to the farm by the technician and the PMA committee may be in order; the objective however, is to operate jointly in the handling of questionable cases and reduce the number of farm visits to be made by both organizations.

b. The determination by SCS of need and practicability of a practice will be governed by the capability of the land, the water situation, the physical characteristics of the site and the contributing watershed, and a consideration of the utility described in the respective ACP handbooks as being the purpose for which ACP assistance may be extended.

In evaluating the need and practicability of a practice, consideration is given to such factors as (1) suitability of soil, (2) slope and other erosion hazards, (3) availability of or use of water and disposal of excess water, (4) range condition, (5) relative importance in relation to other needed practices, (6) desirable sequence of installation, and (7) cost.

c. Consideration should be given also to the spacing or location of certain practices to avoid duplication on a given farm or ranch unit. For example, the spacing of stockwater ponds should be governed by the requirements for good grazing management and the adequacy of water supplies already available.

d. Under conditions where an advanced or basic conservation plan is to be used, necessary survey data are available for determining the need for a specific practice. Where planning procedures are in an initial stage, or when technical assistance is given to ACP participants on farms for which

soil conservation surveys are not available, the technician will determine whether the proposed practices conform to the capabilities and needs of the land, based on his understanding of site conditions.

e. A technician of SCS, or a qualified person designated by the technician, will provide an estimate of the cost of the proposed practice when cost data are necessary to help the farmer determine the practicability of the project. Where practicable, cost data furnished farmers should be in terms of units of work or time required. Money costs should be arrived at by the farmer by applying appropriate unit costs obtained from qualified contractors or others. Where PMA has established "fair prices" for units of work for certain practices, these prices may be used by technicians in computing money costs for those units. Where the amount of PMA assistance offered is a proportion of the cost of carrying out the practice, the estimate of total cost shall be made for the county PMA committee.

3. Approval and disapproval

After making necessary investigations of the need and practicability of a practice covered in an application, the SCS technician will give written notification to the PMA of his approval or disapproval. If the practice is disapproved the technician will give the farmer or rancher full explanation of the reasons therefor and recommend an alternate practice or combination of practices if possible. Further technical assistance will be extended after such alternate proposals as may be agreed on are given the necessary PMA prior approval. In many instances the determination of need and practicability can be carried out in conjunction with other steps in Service assistance. In cases agreed on by the technician and the county committee ahead of time, layout work may proceed on the first trip to the farm. When a practice is disapproved a full explanation in writing shall be given to the PMA county committee. A copy of each approval and disapproval is to be retained in the SCS files.

4. Specifications

a. Specifications for those practices extensively used and for which SCS has technical responsibility are, at least in most cases, to be included in ACP state and county handbooks. Such specifications should be as brief and concise as practicable, but they must be sufficiently comprehensive to serve as a guide to the persons determining need and practicability, laying out, installing and checking performance of such practices.

b. Specifications for those practices having limited use or for those having complex technical features for which SCS has technical responsibility may be prepared on a generalized standard basis applicable to a problem area in soil conservation or other area, or they may be prepared on an individual job basis. These specifications are to be prepared in consultation with appropriate state or county PMA committees. If specifications are not

included in the applicable ACP handbooks the handbook should designate a place where the specifications adopted will be kept on file for use of interested landowners or operators and contractors.

c. The adoption of adequate specifications in state or county ACP handbooks will help to insure the acceptance and use of high technical standards and will aid SCS in carrying out its responsibility for furnishing technical assistance. Specifications included in ACP handbooks or adopted by reference become a legal requirement for the practices and will govern checking performance, consequently they should be carefully prepared. Care should be used to avoid adoption of specifications which may have limited application in the area considered.

d. Each Regional Director and his staff will adopt a plan to assist the State Conservationists in preparing and clearing provisions relating to those permanent practices in state and county ACP handbooks for which the Service is assigned technical responsibility. To facilitate participation in development of state and county ACP handbooks, guide specifications of applicable practices will be prepared by the Regional Director and his staff. The specifications will be developed on a practice basis modified to fit problem areas in soil conservation and in accord with Service technical standards. In connection with such guide specifications criteria made available from the Washington office are to be used for those selected practices covered and the Regional Director and his staff may make adaptation applicable to varying conditions.

5. Technical guidance and supervision

a. SCS technicians, or qualified persons designated by the SCS technician and technically responsible to him, who are trained in the respective phases of conservation to perform or supervise the technical work involved, shall perform or supervise the technical work in (a) planning, (b) layout, (c) installing conservation structures, (d) applying conservation practices, and (e) checking performance. When PMA assigns employees or transfers funds to help SCS in respect to any of these four categories of technical guidance and supervision it should be understood that this assistance applies to whole practices and not to any given portion of a practice, even though the ACP assistance approved for the farm is sufficient to pay only a portion of the cost of the practice. For example, if a farmer is putting in a drainage ditch that will cost \$500 and ACP has approved payment of \$150 on the practice it is intended to reimburse the farmer for a part of the cost of the whole ditch. The personnel or funds made available to SCS by PMA could be used to perform the necessary technical functions on the entire ditch.

b. The planning and design of structures or practices having complex features will be handled by personnel qualified to perform the particular technical job. Plans and specifications for most classes of complex jobs will require approval by designated SCS personnel prior to beginning work.

c. Each Regional Director and his staff will develop a list of jobs, on the basis of complexity, and designate the qualifications of engineers or other technicians qualified to prepare or approve categories of plans and specifications for the various engineering and vegetative practices for which the Service has technical responsibility.

d. The Regional Director and his staff should prepare guides and conduct sufficient training of work groups and work unit personnel to insure efficient operations, accuracy in design and layout of practices, construction or application of good quality, proper checking of performance, and completeness of required field notes and records.

Plans and specifications requiring approval of State Engineers shall have prior approval by the Regional Engineer or a representative designated by the Regional Director.

6. Checking and reporting performance

a. To insure adherence to specifications and protect the investment of the government and the owner or operator, a systematic method of checking and reporting performance will be adopted and applied uniformly in respective work areas. In addition each region will institute a system of examining a representative sample of the work of those checking and reporting performance to assure general conformance to adopted specifications. Such examinations shall be done by others than those responsible for laying out, applying, or checking the practices. This work incident to checking performance is a basic factor in assuring soundness of the work of the Service. Performance reports should always relate to conformance or non-conformance to approved ACP handbook standards. Performance reports should also include an explanation, when necessary, to reflect qualifying circumstances.

b. To promote efficiency in field operations, the SCS will endeavor to correlate procedures for prior approval and clearance, installations and performance reporting with those of PMA. The standardization of inter-agency forms may be made on a regional or state basis, in accordance with established procedures. Field notes and supporting data will be filed in the SCS office and will be available for reference by PMA.

In the preparation of these operating procedures representatives of the ACP Branch of PMA were consulted.



Chief

